

**What is claimed is:**

- 1) A coal-based cellular product comprising a matrix of cells having integral stiffeners or load paths, directed heat transfer paths and/or directed mass transfer paths defined in said matrix by cells of a different density or of a different size.
- 2) The coal-based cellular product of claim 1 prepared from bituminous coal.
- 3) The coal-based cellular product of claim 2 wherein said bituminous coal has a swell index of between about 3 and about 5.
- 4) The coal-based cellular product of claim 2 wherein said bituminous coal has a Gieseler plasticity value above about 500DDPM.
- 5) The coal-based cellular product of claim 1 wherein said stiffeners or load paths, directed heat transfer paths and/or directed mass transfer paths are due to the presence of coal-based cells of a structure differing from those comprising the matrix.
- 6) The coal-based cellular product of claim 1 wherein said stiffeners or load paths, directed heat transfer paths and/or directed mass transfer

paths are due to the presence of coal-based cells of different densities than those comprising the matrix.

- 7) The coal-based product of claim 3 wherein said stiffeners or load paths, and mass transfer paths are defined by the presence of coal-based structure of higher density or greater cell wall thickness than that of the surrounding matrix.
- 8) A method for the production of a coal-based cellular product comprising a matrix of cells having integral stiffeners or load paths, directed heat transfer paths and/or directed mass transfer paths defined in or about said matrix by cells of a different density or of a different size said method comprising:
- A) selecting as the matrix material a first coal-based precursor ground to a particle size below about 1mm which matrix material will, upon expansion, provide a matrix of an appropriate strength and density;
- B) selecting a second coal-based precursor ground to a particle size below about 1mm, but of a different particle size than that of said matrix, said second coal-based precursor when expanded providing the required integral stiffener or load paths, heat transfer paths and/or mass transfer paths;

**C) loading each of said selected coal-based precursors into each of at least two predefined volumes of a mold separated by appropriate partition(s) to define said matrix of said first coal-based precursor having said integral stiffeners or load paths, directed heat transfer paths and/or mass transfer paths defined by said second coal-based precursor in or about said matrix;**

**D) heating said mold under a non-oxidizing atmosphere to a temperature of between about 300°C and about 700°C and soaking at this temperature for a period of from about 10 minutes to about 12 hours; and**

**E) controllably cooling said coal-based product.**

**9) The method of claim 8 wherein said partitions are removed prior to initiation of said heating.**

**10) The method of claim 8 wherein said partitions remain in place during said heating and are either integrated into the coal-based product or vaporized.**

**11) The method of claim 8 wherein said mold comprises glass or ceramic.**

**12) A method for the production of a coal-based cellular product comprising a matrix of cells having integral stiffeners or load paths,**

**directed heat transfer paths and/or directed mass transfer paths defined  
by or about said matrix by cells of a different density comprising:**

- A) placing a coal-based precursor ground to a particle size below  
about 1mm into a thermally conductive mold;**
- B) placing said mold into a pressure chamber under a non-  
oxidizing atmosphere;**
- C) heating said mold at a rapid heat-up rate to a temperature of  
between about 300°C and about 700°C and soaking at this  
temperature for a period of from about 10 minutes to about 12  
hours; and**
- D) controllably cooling said coal-based product  
to provide a product comprising a relatively less dense coal-based  
cellular core surrounded by a relatively more dense and therefore  
less permeable skin.**

- 13) The method of claim 12 wherein said mold comprises aluminum or  
steel.**